



An interview with David Attenborough, Marcia McNutt and Iain Stewart



Some of the special guests at our 175th Anniversary Science Symposium answer our '30-second interview'. **Sir David Attenborough**, Britain's best-known naturalist and broadcaster, **Dr Marcia McNutt**, Director of the United States Geological Survey and **Iain Stewart**, broadcaster and Professor of Geosciences Communication at the University of Plymouth give us their views on a range of subjects, including the major scientific challenges and developments that lie ahead.

Q1: Where do you most like to spend time: mountain, desert, ocean, forest or city?

David Attenborough: *Forest.*

Marcia McNutt: *As an oceanographer by profession, I have spent much time on the high seas for my research. My favourite choice therefore to get away from it all is to head for the wilderness of the high Sierras on my horse where there isn't a cell phone tower in sight.*

Iain Stewart: *Mountain, because the most dynamic landscapes are there, whether it be ice-capped summits or volcanic peaks.*

Q2: Which do you enjoy more: summer sun or winter snow?

David Attenborough: *Summer.*

Marcia McNutt: *My main home is in C-A-L-I-F-O-R-N-I-A. Need I say more?*

Iain Stewart: *Summer sun. Most of my geological research has been on the sun-kissed beaches of Italy, Greece and Turkey so I'm happily attuned to Mediterranean shores.*

Q3: Do you prefer Sat Nav and GPS, or paper map and compass?

David Attenborough: *Map.*

Marcia McNutt: *Duh. There are no power outlets in the high Sierras!*

Iain Stewart: *Paper map, though I have to say that the likes of Google Maps/Earth are becoming compelling and revealing travelling companions.*

Q4: What's the best way to communicate: Twitter, Facebook, e-mail or telephone?

David Attenborough: *Telephone.*

Marcia McNutt: *It completely depends on the message. Some are best delivered in person.*

Iain Stewart: *I haven't managed to get hooked on Twitter or Facebook yet, but for me e-mail is the default whilst phone is often the best.*

Q5: Who inspires you?

David Attenborough: *Darwin.*

Marcia McNutt: *Anyone who stands up for integrity at great personal cost.*

Iain Stewart: *Anyone who crosses the traditional boundaries of their subject. In the past, many of the great thinkers about the planet were daring polymaths but today they seem to be something of an endangered species.*

Q6: What is your most treasured possession?

David Attenborough: *I haven't got one.*

Marcia McNutt: *My three beautiful daughters.*

Iain Stewart: *Those rare instances of unflustered, normal family life.*

Q7: How would you define success?

David Attenborough: *Achieving your own personal objectives.*

Marcia McNutt: *A life of no regrets.*

Iain Stewart: *Managing to spend the bulk of your time doing something that is wonderful fun.*

Q8: What do you see as your greatest achievement?

David Attenborough:

Completing a survey of the main groups of living animals on film.



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Marcia McNutt: See Q6 on previous page.

Iain Stewart: *Managing to spend the bulk of my time doing something that is wonderful fun.*

Q9: If you could carry out any one research project, anywhere in the world, what would it be?

David Attenborough: *I am not a researcher so this is not applicable.*

Marcia McNutt: *Drill to the core–mantle boundary.*

Iain Stewart: *Madre de Dios island, Chile — where a remarkable island staircase potentially holds a record of thousands of years of earthquake jerks of the Patagonian coast. Still unstudied...so far.*

Q10: If you could go to any time in the past, what event would you choose to see?

David Attenborough: *The Jurassic.*

Marcia McNutt: *The Big Bang.*

Iain Stewart: *10 000 years ago, to watch the breaching and draining of the great meltwater lakes of North America.*

Q11: What do you see as the greatest threat facing humankind today?

David Attenborough: *Population explosion.*

Marcia McNutt: *Ignorance of some of the fundamental laws of earth sciences.*

Iain Stewart: *Our collective inability to appreciate that our cherished human economy relies on a well functioning ‘earth economy’.*

Q12: Which do you think is more important — understanding the evolution of the planet on which we live, or exploring other planets?

David Attenborough: *Our own planet.*

Marcia McNutt: *I fear that unless we better understand the trajectory we are currently on for the sustainability of our*

own planet, we may not reap the rewards from extraterrestrial exploration.

Iain Stewart: *Understanding the evolution of our own planet.*

Q13: Rapid technological development has had a huge impact in the natural sciences over the past 50 years. What do you think will be the biggest changes to affect our science in the next 50 years?

David Attenborough: *The discovery of the creation of living creatures from organics and inorganics.*

Marcia McNutt: *I believe that the biggest change will be in how large arrays will revolutionise the ability to manage, process, visualise, and see connections in large datasets. Rather than postulating laws of nature and then looking for confirmation through observations, observations will be mined for possible laws of nature.*

Iain Stewart: *Genome advances for food production and new energy technologies will need to be at the forefront if our kids are to have much of a future.*



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